

CONCEPTUAL METAPHORS AND THEIR EFFECT ON INTELLIGENCE ANALYSIS

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Abstract

This study aims to evaluate the use of conceptual metaphors in intelligence products. Conceptual metaphors are commonly used to describe the world and can reveal the underlying perceptions of the person using the metaphor. Despite their ubiquitous use, there has not been adequate discussion of how conceptual metaphors are used in intelligence products and how they affect the intelligence process. This study uses declassified National Intelligence Estimates (NIEs) from the 1990s to identify and analyze the metaphors used by intelligence analysts. After identifying four important metaphorical concepts present in the NIEs, this study then explains the perceptions and worldviews of the authors that are revealed by the metaphors they use. This study found that these four metaphorical concepts consistently showed that the analysts writing these NIEs had specific views of the state and of conflict that affected their word use and descriptions. The identification of four significant concepts shows the importance of recognizing and evaluating the metaphors used by intelligence analysts. This paper encourages further study of metaphorical concepts used in intelligence analysis and how they might influence the conclusions drawn by both the analysts and the policymakers reading intelligence products.

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Introduction

The use of metaphors is an inherent part of communication as they are commonly used to clarify points or describe abstract experiences. In the last forty years, research into the use of metaphors has shown that metaphors reveal underlying concepts that are foundational to the user's understanding of the world. This revelation, and the subsequent work to verify and expand this idea, prove that metaphors are essential communication tools and are important to consider when discussing how humans think and process their realities. In the intelligence field, critical thinking and communication are the foundations of the discipline. Everyone uses metaphors, so the analysts who produce intelligence products are also likely to have their own metaphors that they use to portray their understanding of the world. Since intelligence is a field that requires an understanding of the world and the ability to explain it, evaluating the metaphors analysts are using could be useful to improving the intelligence process. However, despite the centrality of language and communication in the intelligence field, there has been little to no discussion on how metaphors affect the intelligence process. Conceptual metaphors have been proven to point to the user's perception of reality. Therefore, understanding and evaluating the perceptions that are inherent to intelligence analysts is crucial to ensuring that analysts have the ability to produce timely and relevant intelligence.

This paper will examine declassified intelligence writings from the 1990s to determine what conceptual metaphors the Intelligence Community used and why they are important.¹ To evaluate metaphors used in intelligence, this study seeks to answer this question: What

¹ This paper will not attempt to address the metaphors alluding to past wars or other conflicts. While those are valid conceptual metaphors and common in national security writing, the line between the usage as a metaphor or an analogy is sometimes blurred in the literature discussing war allusions. For this reason, this paper will focus on the more abstract metaphorical concepts to emphasize the presence of hidden metaphors in intelligence writing and thinking.

conceptual metaphors are present in National Intelligence Estimates from the 1990s and what do they reveal about how intelligence officers conceptualize war and geopolitical situations? Using three National Intelligence Estimates from the Gulf War period, this paper will search for the metaphors that analysts used and determine if they point to overarching concepts. Then, those concepts will be evaluated to determine what they reveal about the analysts' worldviews. The hope is that this study can show how important it is for analysts to study their own metaphors and the underlying concepts that they reveal.

Literature Review

Conceptual metaphors and their importance have been a major topic of academic writing for the past several decades. This study reviews the literature on this subject, beginning with the study of conceptual metaphors in the cognitive sciences, discussing metaphors in national security, and concluding with the limited study of conceptual metaphors in the Intelligence Community. By examining the literature on metaphors, it becomes apparent that there is a significant gap in the study of metaphors in intelligence that must be addressed to see how conceptual metaphors can affect the practice of intelligence analysis.

The Study of Conceptual Metaphors:

George Lakoff and Mark Johnson wrote the seminal work on conceptual metaphorical thinking in 1980. Their book, *Metaphors We Live By*, explains that metaphors are a consistent and important part of thinking and expression.² Lakoff and Johnson argue that metaphors point to underlying concepts that shape how human beings view the world. Metaphors are not simply

² George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, "Metaphors we Live By," *Chicago, IL: University of Chicago* (1980).

words used to describe things; they are part of a conceptual understanding of the abstract, or a way to clarify ideas through more familiar concepts. For example, Lakoff and Johnson repeatedly refer to the concept of “argument as war,” to show how words describing arguments fit into a conceptual understanding of one thing as the other (see Table 1).³

Table 1:

| |
|---|
| ARGUMENT IS WAR |
| Your claims are <i>indefensible</i> . |
| He <i>attacked every weak point</i> in my argument. |
| His criticisms were <i>right on target</i> . |
| I <i>demolished</i> his argument. |
| I’ve never <i>won</i> an argument with him. |
| You disagree? Okay, <i>shoot</i> ! |
| If you use that <i>strategy</i> , he’ll <i>wipe you out</i> . |
| He <i>shot down</i> all of my arguments. |

Examples from *Metaphors We Live By*.⁴

While the terms used in this example are familiar and seem normal, placing them together under the conceptual heading of “argument as war,” makes it apparent that the words used when discussing arguments are often in terms of war. Lakoff and Johnson describe these as “conceptual metaphors,” or metaphors that point to a specific concept that the user has for the topic being described. This is just one example Lakoff and Johnson use to show how conceptual metaphors explain abstract topics in understandable terms. Conceptual metaphors are important because they reveal a person’s perceptions. Lakoff and Johnson argue that metaphorical concepts, “structure what we perceive, how we get around in the world, and how we relate to other people.”⁵ Using specific metaphors to explain something shows the approach one is taking to that subject or idea. Lakoff and Johnson point out that “we act according to the way we

³ Lakoff and Johnson, 4 and throughout the book.

⁴ Ibid, 4.

⁵ Ibid, 3.

perceive things,” making conceptual metaphors important in revealing how people see the world.⁶

Lakoff and Johnson believe that metaphors “have the power to define reality.”⁷ Metaphors have this power because establishing one concept in terms of another transfers the metaphor’s specific characteristics onto the original subject (as with “argument as war”). This inevitably causes some aspects of the original idea to be highlighted and others to be hidden. Since metaphors are pointing to a specific concept, “a metaphorical concept can keep us from focusing on other aspects of the concept that are inconsistent with that metaphor.” This “hiding” of concepts can influence the way a situation is viewed. For example, in the metaphorical concept that “argument is war,” arguments take on the characteristics of war – us vs. them, combat, intensity, etc. If there were other aspects of arguing, perhaps less harsh and adverse terms, they are nearly impossible to describe using the metaphorical concept of argument as war. The metaphorical concept effectively hides the softer, more subtle sides of argument by comparing it to war.

Two other aspects of metaphors worth noting are the use of metonymy and the existence of “dead” metaphors. Metonymy is the use of one specific entity as a representative of an entire related entity. The clearest example of this is when a state is referred to by its leader, who is then portrayed as representing that state as a whole. This is of course common when discussing geopolitical affairs and is very relevant to intelligence writings as metonymy is commonly used to explain the actions of a state, i.e. Saddam entered Kuwait, Putin meddled in elections, etc. Metonymy is an important aspect of metaphorical concepts because it is not only replacing one entity with another but is having a specific person or entity represent another in its entirety.

⁶ Lakoff and Johnson, 5.

⁷ Ibid, 157.

“Dead” metaphors are those metaphors whose usage is so common and pervasive, that they do not make up a metaphorical concept anymore, they are simply descriptors with no underlying conceptual framework. Lakoff and Johnson’s example for this is the “mountain is a person” metaphorical concept. Nearly everyone refers to the bottom of a mountain as the “foot” of the mountain. While this is a metaphorical comparison of part of the mountain to part of a person, very few people would even recognize that as metaphor and instead consider it common vernacular. Lakoff and Johnson concede that these could then be considered “dead” metaphors because there are no other instances where the “mountain is a person” metaphor plays out.⁸ However, they make the point that just because a metaphor is commonly used does not make it “dead” – only those metaphors that have no consistent use of the underlying concept deserve the term. Lakoff and Johnson’s thorough discussions of conceptual metaphors makes their book the natural and only starting place to understanding how metaphors shape reality.

In the four decades since Lakoff and Johnson published *Metaphors We Live By*, tens of thousands of studies, reports, and articles have been written exploring how metaphors shape people’s interactions and thoughts. Lakoff and Johnson’s ideas have been expanded and applied to many different fields, with the bulk of the work being done in the cognitive sciences and psychology. In 1992, Keysar and Glucksberg identified some possible problems with the identification of concepts based on the individual metaphors.⁹ Lakoff and Johnson identify a specific overarching concept for various metaphors that bind unrelated things into one cohesive conceptual comparison. While the “argument as war” example was explained above, another example is the concept that “love is a building.” The use of phrases such as “we are *building* a

⁸ Lakoff and Johnson, 55.

⁹ Boaz Keysar and Sam Glucksberg, "Metaphor and Communication," *Poetics Today* 13, no. 4 (1992), 651-653 doi:10.2307/1773292. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1773292>.

strong *foundation* for our relationship,” point to that conceptual understanding of love. In the years following *Metaphors We Live By*, this process was expanded and came to be known as “conceptual mapping” to explain the process of identifying and labeling metaphors under a certain concept.¹⁰ Keysar and Glucksberg do not argue against the logic of metaphorical concepts, but determine that there are cases in which conceptual mapping might not correctly show the properties of the metaphor being used. While their theory is technical in its explanation, their basic idea is important to consider: although some words seem to fit into a metaphorical concept, this does not mean they are definitively used for that concept. They go so far as to say that, “the conceptual-mapping approach may be downright misleading.”¹¹ The authors argue that more specific concept application must occur to ensure that the metaphor is properly understood. Keysar and Glucksberg do not disprove Lakoff and Johnson’s work; rather they add another layer of thinking to ensure that conceptual mapping does not counteract the purpose of the metaphor being used. This is important to keep in mind while searching for metaphors in intelligence writing, because it can be easy to mislabel and misunderstand the metaphor being used.

More recently, James Geary wrote on the concept of metaphor and how it “shapes the way we see the world.”¹² His book, *I Is An Other*, works to show how metaphors are pervasive in all fields. He states that metaphors are “at work in all fields of human endeavor,” because “metaphor is a way of thought long before it is a way with words.”¹³ Geary’s purpose is to show how ubiquitous metaphors are and to take them out of the typical fields of language or cognitive

¹⁰ Keysar and Glucksberg, 651.

¹¹ Ibid, 652.

¹² James Geary, *I is an Other: The Secret Life of Metaphor and how it Shapes the Way we See the World* (New York, New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2011), Title.

¹³ Ibid, 3.

science. He states that on average, people use about six metaphors in each minute, or one every ten to twenty-five words.¹⁴ With such common use of metaphors, it makes sense that they appear in every field and on all topics. In his book, Geary writes each chapter on a different field of work and explains how metaphor is used in each respective field. The most relevant chapter to this paper is his chapter on metaphor in politics. Through multiple examples, he shows that metaphor is used very effectively in political discourse to persuade. He highlights the importance of this by saying, “metaphorical choices don’t just reflect opinions and actions; they help shape them. So becoming aware of which metaphors are at work – and why – provides an essential reality check in political debate.”¹⁵ Geary’s book emphasizes the point Lakoff and Johnson introduced: that metaphors are not just words or descriptors, but can also be persuasive and craft a specific reality according to the concepts they promote.

Metaphorical Thinking in National Security:

As the study of conceptual metaphors began to spread into various fields, it made its way briefly into the national security realm. Eleven years after the publication of *Metaphors We Live By*, Lakoff branched out into the field of national security to discuss the metaphors used during the Gulf War. His article, “Metaphor and War,” pointed out key conceptual metaphors used by policymakers to explain and justify the Gulf War.¹⁶ The main conceptual metaphors he focused on were “war as politics; politics as business,” the “state-as-person system,” and the “causal commerce system.”¹⁷ The “war as politics” metaphor is based on Clausewitz’s famous dictum

¹⁴ Geary, 5.

¹⁵ Ibid, 135.

¹⁶ George Lakoff, "Metaphor and War: The Metaphor System used to Justify War in the Gulf," *Peace Research* 23, no. 2 (1991), 25-32. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23609916>.

¹⁷ Ibid, 26-27.

that “war is the continuation of policy through other means.”¹⁸ Lakoff explains that since politics is often conceptualized as a business, then war also becomes conceptualized as a business. The state-as-person metaphor is particularly important in Lakoff’s article because he was writing about the Gulf War. The consistent use of personification for the state, as well as the metonymy of the ruler, Saddam Hussein, substituting for the state, showed that policymakers throughout the Gulf War maintained a concept of the “state as a person” and expected it to act as such.¹⁹ The “causal commerce system,” which includes multiple conceptual metaphors about state action, introduces the expectation of rational action by states and other actors.²⁰ The most interesting aspect of Lakoff’s piece is not the identification of the metaphorical concepts, but his explanations showing how they interact and affect each other. Through the example of the Gulf War, Lakoff shows how the expectations that come with the war-as-business concept directly interact with the concept of the state-as-person. This creates a new view of war as a cost-benefit analysis where states are rational actors working for their own “health” and “well-being.”²¹ However, as Lakoff points out, these concepts rarely represent the exact actions of states in war. His article ends with a sobering reminder that, “the use of a metaphor with a set of definitions becomes pernicious when it hides realities in a harmful way. It is important to distinguish what is metaphorical and what is not.”²² Lakoff’s piece is an excellent look at how metaphors can affect national security, and was one of the first articles on the subject as metaphor began to interest national security writers in the 1990s.

¹⁸ Bernard Brodie and Rosalie West, "On the Nature of War," In *On War*, edited by Howard, Michael and Peter Paret, 73-124: Princeton University Press, 1984. doi:10.2307/j.ctt7svzz.12, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt7svzz.12>, 87.

¹⁹ Lakoff, 27.

²⁰ Ibid, 27-28.

²¹ Ibid, 31.

²² Ibid, 32.

In 1996, metaphors were a popular subject at the “Complexity, Global Politics, and National Security Conference.” The conference, sponsored by the RAND Corporation and National Defense University, focused on the state of military and geopolitical affairs following the Cold War. The premise of the conference was to bring together the best academic minds to “emphasize the nonlinearity of international affairs” and push to further the application of nonlinear ideas and Complexity Theory to military and political establishments.²³ Many of the writings from the conference, compiled and edited by Alberts and Czerwinski, discussed the metaphorical concept of “linearity” and how it is affecting the actions of the United States.²⁴ The underlying issue with linearity, as mentioned in the papers, is that it does not give a holistic representation of the world. The linearity metaphor implies that there is still a straight and consistent order to actions and reactions. This metaphor shows that there is a lack of imagination when conceptualizing geopolitics, which is why the conference pushed to study nonlinear metaphors and Complexity Theory. Alan Beyerchen’s conference paper, “Clausewitz, Nonlinearity, and the Importance of Imagery,” directly addressed the importance of reconsidering linearity metaphors, particularly in the new, multi-polar world environment. He said, “we need for our own sake to understand the limitation our imagination places upon us,” and called for an application of nonlinear concepts to the national security field.²⁵ In another paper titled, “Complexity, Chaos, and National Security Policy: Metaphors or Tools?,” Alvin Saperstein stated, “It is clear that the set of metaphors which underline our thoughts and discussions about the political world determine our responses to matters of war and peace.”²⁶

²³ David S. Alberts and Thomas J. Czerwinski, "Complexity, Global Politics, and National Security" National Defense University, November 13-14, 1996, (published 1997), iv.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid, 76.

²⁶ Ibid, 45.

Despite the focus on metaphors at the conference, conceptual metaphors were still not a popular topic in national security and following the attacks on September 11, 2001, only a few pieces were written discussing the use of metaphors.

In 2007, Juyan Zhang picked up the topic of conceptual metaphors to evaluate the language surrounding the recent wars in the Middle East. His paper focused on the messaging aspect of metaphors and how policymakers used them to sell ideas. Zhang's article took different conceptual metaphors that policymakers used, broke down the origins and contexts of each metaphor, and then explained what "image" or idea was created by that metaphor.²⁷ His methodical approach to the various metaphors used by policymakers showed how central the metaphorical concept was to selling ideas to the public. Zhang showed that the use of metaphors helped policymakers justify their actions in the Middle East and explained the importance of said actions in language the public could understand. Another important point that Zhang focused on was what the metaphors were hiding. He states that the metaphors, "highlighted aspects consistent with the archetypal metaphor...but hide certain aspects of the realpolitik motivations in international relations."²⁸ Zhang's study of the metaphors used post-9/11 reveals how politicians and leaders can use the power of metaphor to shape actions and public response.

Metaphorical Thinking in Intelligence:

These writings show that conceptual metaphors were beginning to make an impression on the field of national security. However, the conversation was not carried over into the intelligence field. Despite their close relation, there is only one article published that begins to

²⁷ Juyan Zhang, *Beyond Anti-Terrorism: Metaphors as Message Strategy of Post-September-11 U.S. Public Diplomacy*, Vol. 33, 2007), 31-39, doi:<https://doi-org.proxy1.library.jhu.edu/10.1016/j.pubrev.2006.11.006>.

²⁸ Ibid, 38.

question how conceptual metaphors affect intelligence analysis. In his 2017 article, “The Metaphor is the Message: Reconsidering Word Use for Today’s Security Environment,” Josh Kerbel argued that a change in concepts was needed for the Intelligence Community to offer sound, relevant analysis.²⁹ The conceptual metaphor he focused on is linearity. Kerbel argues that though linear terms were useful during the Cold War, “the national landscape of the United States became...much more networked, meaning that the behavioral dynamics of its features became much less mechanistic.”³⁰ He reinforces his point by referencing recent intelligence surprises, such as the Arab Spring, claiming that older, linear concepts can help explain why intelligence struggled to adapt to the modern security environment.³¹ Kerbel concluded with a call to reevaluate the terms used in intelligence writing and thinking. He specifically encouraged the intelligence field to “use metaphors drawn from more organic disciplines such as meteorology, biology, ecology, and epidemiology,” to adapt to the new security environment.³² However, there is no apparent discussion or research on intelligence officers’ approach to metaphors since his article was first published.

The intelligence field has many academics that have written on the topic of thinking and processing in intelligence. The idea of thinking about thinking in intelligence has been studied to help analysts know themselves better and therefore improve the process of intelligence analysis. In 2005, Rob Johnston published an ethnography titled, *Analytic Culture in the U.S. Intelligence Community*. His book, published by the CIA’s Center for the Study of Intelligence, took a deep

²⁹ Josh Kerbel, “The Metaphor Is the Message: Reconsidering Word Use for Today’s Security Environment,” *National Intelligence University*, December 5, 2017, published internally at National Intelligence University and provided to me by the author, 1-3; a publicly released version was published as follows: “The Dead Metaphors of National Security.” *Defense One*, May, 2018. <https://www.defenseone.com/ideas/2018/05/dead-metaphors-national-security/147887/> (accessed Jan 28, 2020).

³⁰ Ibid, 2.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

look at the cultural norms and expectations in the IC and how those are affecting the work of intelligence analysts.³³ Johnston's book first presents his findings on the process of intelligence and the problems analysts face in their work. The final part of his book contains his recommendations for improvement. Johnston's book is an essential piece of intelligence literature and shows that the intelligence community has taken the time to consider analysts' positions and how they approach their work.

In 1999, Richard Heuer's book, *Psychology of Intelligence Analysis*, discussed the psychological foundations of intelligence and mental tools analysts can use to improve intelligence products. Heuer writes that "intelligence analysis is fundamentally a mental process, but understanding this process is hindered by the lack of conscious awareness of the workings of our own minds."³⁴ His book works to solve that problem and offer tangible ways intelligence analysts can understand their own thinking. Both Heuer and Johnson's works show that the intelligence field has invested time in studying how analysts think and process the world. However, there has not been adequate contemplation on how metaphors fit into this topic.

The lack of literature discussing conceptual metaphors in intelligence is a major gap in intelligence research. It has been forty years since metaphorical thinking has been proven to be crucial to the way humans craft their realities. Why has the intelligence community not examined how this might be affecting or influencing their work? This paper attempts to provide a small beginning to further research on this subject and show that conceptual metaphors are as present and powerful in intelligence writing as they are in other fields.

³³ Rob Johnston, *Analytic Culture in the U.S. Intelligence Community: An Ethnographic Study*, Washington, DC: The Center for the Study of Intelligence, 2005, available at <https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/books-and-monographs/analytic-culture-in-the-u-s-intelligence-community/index.html>.

³⁴ Richard J. Heuer Jr., *Psychology of Intelligence Analysis*, Washington, DC: Center for the Study of Intelligence, 1999, available at <https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/books-and-monographs/psychology-of-intelligence-analysis/PsychofIntelNew.pdf>, 1.

Methodology

This study will analyze National Intelligence Estimates (NIEs) looking for conceptual metaphors and tracking when and how they were used. It will first search for the metaphors present in the text and create lists of similar terms being used. These metaphors will then be grouped together based on their subject matter to find the underlying concepts being used to characterize those subjects. Next, what is hidden or revealed by those metaphorical concepts will be analyzed. Finally, this study will compare the implications and hidden ideas to see what the conceptual metaphors reveal about the worldview or mindset of the intelligence analysts who use them. Lakoff and Johnson established that metaphors highlight certain aspects of a thing and hide other aspects. It is critical to understand what is implied or hidden in the metaphors used in intelligence because they reveal the analysts' worldviews and could influence the conclusions made by the policymakers who read intelligence products.

This study hypothesizes that these documents will reveal strong conceptual metaphors pointing to the intelligence officers' views of the world. It is also expected that those metaphors will hide important aspects of geopolitics that should be considered. Because of the subject matter, some of the metaphorical concepts in the NIEs might be similar to those discussed by Lakoff, Kerbel, and Zhang in their writings, in which case their analysis of what is implied and what is hidden by those metaphors will be incorporated. The hypothesis will be determined correct or incorrect based on the relevance of the conceptual metaphors found and whether or not they reveal a significantly strong bias towards a certain worldview or paradigm.

The data is drawn from three NIEs from the 1990s discussing Saddam Hussein's viability immediately after the Gulf War. These three NIEs were selected for their authorship, period of publication, subject matter, and availability. National Intelligence Estimates were chosen as the

data because they are collaborative documents written by most of the agencies in the Intelligence Community (IC). Using documents that represented multiple agencies was important to ensure a single agency's writings were not equated as indicative of the IC as a whole. By using NIEs, concepts that are used and understood community-wide can be examined. Choosing estimates that were written at least twenty years ago was necessary to ensure that this study could use multiple declassified documents on the same subject. The Gulf War period was chosen because of its time period and its relation to the literature. Lakoff's piece "Metaphor and War," directly discussed Gulf War metaphors used by policymakers which would make it easier searching for the conceptual metaphors because there might be some overlap. Kerbel's piece also discussed how the linearity metaphor was less relevant after the Cold War but was still being regularly used. Because of that, this study uses estimates that were near the end of or after the Cold War to examine if linearity metaphors were still used. Finally, the NIEs were chosen because of their availability. They were declassified and findable on the CIA's Freedom of Information Act Reading Room database.

The three NIEs were published in 1991, 1992, and 1993 respectively. The 1991 piece is titled, "Saddam Husayn's Prospects for Survival Over the Next Year," and discusses Saddam's network of support, his control over the military, and the prospects for the Iraqi economy after the Gulf War. The 1992 piece is titled, "Saddam Husayn: Likely to Hang On," and discusses how Saddam maintained his power and why he will likely remain in power in the near future. The final piece, published in December of 1993, is titled, "Prospects for Iraq: Saddam and Beyond." It expands the scope by discussing the economic and living situations in Iraq as well as Saddam's maintenance of power. These three documents are similar in subject matter which will help to find relevant and consistent metaphors between all three NIEs.

Using the methods above, there were four metaphorical concepts that became apparent in the NIEs. The four metaphorical concepts were the state as a person, war/politics as linear, the state as a machine, and political support/power as land. These concepts were chosen because of the availability of metaphors pointing to them, and their relevance to important aspects of geopolitics. In the table below, the frequency of metaphors for each metaphorical concept is displayed. As shown, some of the concepts were more frequent than others, but all are worth noting because of the number of metaphors used reinforcing the concept. Only four metaphorical concepts were chosen for analysis to remain with the scope of the paper and hypothesis and allow for deeper evaluation.

Table 2:

| Metaphorical Concept | # of Metaphors found for each concept |
|---------------------------------|--|
| State as Person | 34 |
| War/Politics as Linear | 31 |
| State as a Machine | 19 |
| Political Support/Power as Land | 24 |

This research is not a final determination on how metaphors affect the intelligence community. Its purpose is to show that metaphorical concepts are present in intelligence writing and are powerful guides for how the IC views the world and the situations it analyzes. This study hopes to highlight a topic that is important to consider and deserves more attention from intelligence officers. Because of metaphors' ability to help craft realities, it is imperative that intelligence officers examine their own work and recognize what is hidden and what is revealed by the metaphors they use.

Data and Analysis

Listed below are some of the metaphorical concepts found in the three NIEs. This is not a comprehensive list as humans use one metaphor every ten to twenty words, making it difficult to

include all the metaphorical concepts in this paper.³⁵ Instead, this study includes those metaphors most relevant or important when assessing how metaphorical concepts affect the work and views of intelligence officers.

1. State as a Person Metaphor

In all three NIEs, the state as a person metaphor was used when discussing Iraq, the United States, and even the United Nations. The NIEs were mostly about Saddam's personal actions to remain in power, so the metonymy of ruler-as-state was not present. However, since the subject matter was focused on Saddam himself, it is important to distinguish between discussion of Saddam's behavior and actions and those personifying the state. As shown below, there are many examples in all three NIEs to support the concept of the state as a person.

Examples (metaphor italicized):

- "propaganda *organs* of the state"³⁶
- "regime is *turning a blind eye*"³⁷
- "Baghdad's natural *destiny* to *play a major role*"³⁸
- "US partners in the region, who will *feel* the political repercussions"³⁹
- "Iraq would probably *react*"⁴⁰
- "efforts to *woo* Turkey"⁴¹
- "troubles the UN *is facing*"⁴²
- "preserve *Iraq's integrity*"⁴³

³⁵ Geary, 5.

³⁶ Director of Central Intelligence, Iraq: Saddam Husayn's Prospects for Survival Over the Next Year," *Special National Intelligence Estimate*, September 1991, available at <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB167/09.pdf> (accessed February 22, 2020), 3 (herein after "1991 NIE").

³⁷ 1991 NIE, 10.

³⁸ 1991 NIE, 11.

³⁹ 1991 NIE, 13.

⁴⁰ Director of Central Intelligence, "Saddam Husayn: Likely to Hang On," *National Intelligence Estimate*, June 1992, available at <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB167/10.pdf> (accessed February 22, 2020), 1 (herein after "1992 NIE").

⁴¹ 1992 NIE, 3.

⁴² 1992 NIE, 4.

⁴³ 1992 NIE, 4

- “*behavior* of this regime”⁴⁴
- “Iraq *agreed* to abide”⁴⁵
- “Baghdad has been *enticing* governments”⁴⁶
- “the regime has *cannibalized and drawn from*”⁴⁷
- “*intimidate* Gulf War foes”⁴⁸

It is unsurprising that the state-as-person metaphor is present here as it is a nearly universal conceptualization of the state. However, it still reveals and hides very specific characteristics of a state and guides the reader’s expectations of state action. The state-as-person concept can be a very helpful conceptualization because states are governed by people and therefore often mimic human actions. States have to make decisions, take action, and respond to problems much like humans do. In this way, having the state-as-person metaphorical concept can be helpful to discuss what a state might do and when. The well-being of the state, which is a part of the state-as-person metaphor, is also a relevant comparison. Much like humans take care of their bodies to avoid illness, states must take care of their populace and institutions to avoid falling apart. This is why the state-as-person concept is commonly used – it actually gives a helpful description to the ambiguity that is a “state.”

However, the state-as-person concept is not infallible as it hides aspects of a state in its comparison. One thing the state-as-person metaphor hides is the internal struggles of a state. Lakoff discusses this, stating that the “State-as-a-Person metaphor highlight the ways in which states act as units, and hides the internal structure of the state.”⁴⁹ This is painfully apparent in these NIE’s. “Iraq” and “Baghdad” were terms consistently personified to describe the decisions

⁴⁴ 1992 NIE, 5.

⁴⁵ Director of Central Intelligence, “Prospects for Iraq: Saddam and Beyond,” *National Intelligence Estimate*, December 1993, available at <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB167/12.pdf> (accessed February 22, 2020), vi, (herein after “1993 NIE”).

⁴⁶ 1993 NIE, vi.

⁴⁷ 1993 NIE, 15

⁴⁸ 1993 NIE, 31

⁴⁹ Lakoff, 31.

made by state leadership or how the state as a whole reacted to external action. However, there was also much discussion on the consistent ethnic conflicts present in Iraq and the various rebellions disrupting the borders and pushing for autonomy. By characterizing the state as a person, these sorts of internal conflicts can be hidden from the analyst's conceptual understanding of the state. The result is a lack of continuity in the description of Iraq – Iraq is described as both a single state and a fractured group of ethnic units.

Another important aspect hidden in the state-as-person metaphor is that things that fit with the “national interest” might not actually represent the citizens or people that make up the state. We see this in these intelligence writing as terms such as “weaker” and “stronger” are often used to describe Iraq or Saddam, but make no reference to how the perceived weakness or strength of the leader/state actually affects the majority of people living in the state. Disagreements within the leadership itself are also hidden by this metaphor. Fissures in the leadership could have important implications for analysts to consider but using the state-as-person metaphor conceals these disagreements.⁵⁰ By using the state-as-person metaphor, the analysts must reduce the state to a single entity, which is unhelpful when trying to consider how an action would affect the populace as well as the government.

Neither of these hidden characterizations are absolutely destructive. A good analyst would be able to address fracturing and the well-being of the populace even if they use personifying metaphors. However, the danger comes when there is no recognition of these metaphorical concepts. If analysts do not consider how their language is creating a certain

⁵⁰ The problem of the state being viewed as a unitary rational actor is not new. In 1966, Graham Allison wrote about the Rational Policy Model, which concludes that analysts think about states as united, rational actors which influences their conclusions as to why states act the way they do. The issues with the rational policy model are similar to the problems inherent in the state-as-person metaphor. (Allison, Graham T. "Conceptual Models and the Cuban Missile Crisis." *The American Political Science Review* 63, no. 3 (1969): 689-718. doi:10.2307/1954423. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1954423>.)

narrative, they might not think to include those other aspects or reconcile them to the concept of the state as a person. This lack of awareness could be very damaging when this same metaphor is applied to states that perhaps do not have singular rule or are even more fractured than Iraq. In this way, the state-as-person metaphor reveals the importance of thinking through word choice and underlying concepts when producing intelligence products.

2. War or Politics as Linear

The linearity of conflict and politics is also present in all three estimates. To find these linear metaphors, I used the examples offered by Kerbel in his article to guide my search and then expanded that to include other metaphors that had a foundation in Newtonian mechanics.⁵¹

Examples:

- “a *move* by a coalition”⁵²
- “political culture has *shaped*”⁵³
- “*reducing tensions* with his primary regional adversary”⁵⁴
- “international *pressure* and bilateral *tension*”⁵⁵
- “using economic *pressure*”⁵⁶
- “*gradual move* toward democracy”⁵⁷
- “retains a number of *levers*”⁵⁸
- “*vacuum* of power in Iraq”⁵⁹
- “in the United Nations is *showing some strain*”⁶⁰
- “undermine their ability to maintain *cohesion*”⁶¹
- “*levers* to keep military opposition in check”⁶²

⁵¹ Kerbel, 2.

⁵² 1993 NIE, viii.

⁵³ 1993 NIE, 8.

⁵⁴ 1993 NIE, 18.

⁵⁵ 1993 NIE, 18.

⁵⁶ 1992 NIE, iii.

⁵⁷ 1993 NIE, 33.

⁵⁸ 1991 NIE, 6.

⁵⁹ 1991 NIE, 11.

⁶⁰ 1993 NIE, 16.

⁶¹ 1992 NIE, 3.

⁶² 1991 NIE, vii.

The linearity metaphor is also unsurprising to find in these documents as Alberts and Czerwinski and Kerbel showed how linear metaphors were consistently used in discussing geopolitics. As Kerbel mentions, the linearity metaphors come from Newtonian mechanics, using descriptors from physics to explain the more abstract relationships that occur in the geopolitical realm.⁶³ The importance of their inclusion here is what they imply and what they hide. The linearity metaphor is not completely without merit, even in the current geopolitical situation. When interactions occur between two states, using metaphors such as tension and balance, can help clarify the more abstract concept of negotiation between states. The idea of movement (inertia, trajectory, backlash, etc.) is also useful for some aspects of geopolitics. Plans are made “moving” into the future and the consequences or characteristics of movement can apply clarity for the consequences of decisions or the actions they create because decisions and plans themselves are more abstract, non-physical things.⁶⁴

However, as previously mentioned, the linearity metaphor can break down because of what is hidden in the metaphor and how that relates to the current geopolitical situation. Most importantly, the linearity metaphor hides the inherent chaos and complexity of the world. As Kerbel shows in his article, many of these terms and metaphors come from an age of bipolarity.⁶⁵ The ideas of tension and balance of power were relevant during the Cold War but are not as applicable to the current state of world affairs. This is important to consider in the case of Iraq during and after the Gulf War. The makeup of the post-colonial Middle East, and the ethnic and religious divisions inherent in it, do not provide an environment where linear, physics-based

⁶³ Kerbel, 1.

⁶⁴ This concept partially uses the metaphorical concept of “time as a moving object” or “time as a resource” which quantify and apply physical attributes to the abstract concept of time. This is discussed in Chapters 9 and 13 of Lakoff and Johnson’s book, *Metaphors We Live By*. The concept of time-as-a-moving-object/resource allows physical metaphors to apply to non-physical things by relying on time as a physical idea that things can be “placed on” or “moved through.”

⁶⁵ Kerbel, 1

concepts are helpful. By conceptualizing conflict and geopolitics as linear, analysts are going to focus more on the balances, tensions, and forward motions that are occurring in the situation, instead of considering cyclical or biological concepts from which to draw comparisons.

While linear metaphors were more present, the 1993 estimate did show the use of some non-linearity metaphors of the type that Kerbel was pushing for in his article.⁶⁶

Non-linearity Examples:

- “INC is *plagued by*”⁶⁷
- “the vicious *circle* of the past can readily be broken”⁶⁸
- “*layers* of... services arranged like a *series of concentric rings*”⁶⁹
- “forms the *outermost ring*”⁷⁰

The use of non-linear metaphors is helpful because it creates new ways to view situations. Instead of viewing political issues or conflict as based in mechanics, they could instead be viewed as an illness to be cured, or a more cyclical situation which changes the response. These metaphors were sparse and were only found in one of the NIEs, but they prove that some non-linear examples have made their way into intelligence writing. However, the overwhelming preponderance of linearity metaphors compared to non-linear metaphors shows how strong the concept of linearity still is in intelligence thought.

3. State as a Machine

Similar to both the state-as-person and war/politics-as-linear conceptual metaphors is the concept of the state as a machine. Mechanical language was also found in all three NIEs and consistently used when discussing the functioning of the state.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 2-3.

⁶⁷ 1993 NIE, 24.

⁶⁸ 1993 NIE, 35.

⁶⁹ 1993 NIE, 12.

⁷⁰ 1993 NIE, 12.

Examples:

- “*calibrate* his action”⁷¹
- “hesitate to *launch*”⁷²
- “*instruments* of intimidation”⁷³
- “relaxation of *internal controls*”⁷⁴
- “willing to amend party thinking, if not its *machinery*”⁷⁵
- “the regime’s principal *instruments for control*”⁷⁶
- “violence is an accepted political *tool*”⁷⁷
- “a major propaganda effort designed to *generate* international sympathy”⁷⁸
- “establishing *the model* for the future”⁷⁹
- “*mechanisms* of power”⁸⁰
- “facilitate their *innovation*”⁸¹
- “defense system...could be *activated* quickly”⁸²

The metaphorical concept of the state as a machine has merit. States often function according to specific sets of hierarchies and rules, which means there are causal effects and resulting actions, much like machinery. It also creates an image of a state as something to be upkept and serviced. Parts can be replaced and inputs or outputs can be changed by electing/appointing new members of the state or government and bringing in new ideas. The machine metaphor also implies that there is something being created or maintained by the machine, which is relevant as states ideally provide services and protection to their constituents.

However, the state-as-machine metaphor also hides significant aspects of state functioning. By ascribing a state the characteristics of a machine, the struggles and deadlocks of

⁷¹ 1991 NIE, viii.

⁷² 1991 NIE, viii.

⁷³ 1991 NIE, 1.

⁷⁴ 1991 NIE, 1.

⁷⁵ 1991 NIE, 3.

⁷⁶ 1991 NIE, 5.

⁷⁷ 1991 NIE, 11.

⁷⁸ 1993 NIE, vi.

⁷⁹ 1993 NIE, 35.

⁸⁰ 1993 NIE, 34.

⁸¹ 1993 NIE, 34.

⁸² 1992 NIE, 3.

bureaucracy are left behind. Machines are generally viewed as functioning for a specific service and working to produce the same result every time. Governments do not work that way in practice. The ability to calibrate or fine-tune government is rare because humans are involved. Since there are people making individual decisions, the state is not going to continually function in a structured, controlled manner. There are also many things out of the state's control. While a machine is programmed to serve a specific function, the government must continually adapt to unexpected circumstances. The constant shifting of priorities and decisions makes the government much too dynamic to always fit within the metaphorical concept of a machine.

The conceptualization of the state as a machine is similar to the state-as-person metaphor – it is useful and is not outright incorrect to characterize a state in that way. Like the state-as-person metaphor, the danger of the state-as-machine conceptual metaphor is in non-recognition of the metaphor itself. If analysts do not recognize that they are viewing the state as a machine, they might miss topics or issues that would not follow the predicable or rigid structure of a machine.

Another important aspect to note: in these three documents, analysts characterized the state as at least two different conceptual metaphors. This is a common way of conceptualization which was discussed by Lakoff and Johnson in their book.⁸³ Often multiple conceptual metaphors will highlight the same characterizations of the topic. Here, the state-as-person and the state-as-machine metaphors highlight some of the same aspects of a state:

- States are unified
- States functions according to a specific set of expectations (human instincts or machine output)
- States have internal organs/controls that change or guide their actions

⁸³ Lakoff and Johnson, Chapter 17.

They also hide some of the same aspects, particularly the lack of cohesion in a state. The combination of these metaphors reinforces these characteristics of the state, revealing that the people who wrote these metaphors have an even stronger view of the state as unified than was revealed by a single metaphorical concept. However, the state-as-person and state-as-machine metaphors also differ in what they imply, showing that the metaphorical concepts are not absolute. Humans have the ability to view multiple facets of an idea separately, which is what makes using different metaphors useful. When two concepts are used, the important thing is to recognize where they overlap to see what is more strongly implied by the combination of the concepts.

4. Political Support/Power as Land

This metaphorical concept, like the state as a machine, was not discussed in the literature cited above but was very apparent in these documents. The consistent use of environmental metaphors when discussing the maintenance of political support and power showed that there was a strong underlying concept present.

Examples:

- “absolute power has *eroded*”⁸⁴
- “significant *erosion* of support”⁸⁵
- “*cultivate* an elaborate doctrine”⁸⁶
- “ability to reassert Iraqi power and ambition *will grow*”⁸⁷
- “the regime is *growing stronger*”⁸⁸
- “demonstrating *growing confidence*”⁸⁹
- “helping to *erode* Saddam’s ability to *preserve his power*”⁹⁰
- “establish an *environment* that threatens him”⁹¹

⁸⁴ 1991 NIE, v.

⁸⁵ 1991 NIE, vii.

⁸⁶ 1991 NIE, 3.

⁸⁷ 1991 NIE, 13.

⁸⁸ 1992 NIE, iii.

⁸⁹ 1992 NIE, 1.

⁹⁰ 1993 NIE, v.

⁹¹ 1993 NIE, v.

- “work to *weed out* real and imagined regime opponents”⁹²
- “helping Saddam’s regime *weather* sanctions”⁹³
- “significant *erosion* of his power base”⁹⁴
- “*evolution* of Iraq will be unstable and *stormy*”⁹⁵
- “*new wave* of political reform”⁹⁶

Support and power as land is a helpful metaphor in many ways. It implies that if leaders prepare well and invest in their beliefs, they will “take root” or “grow.” It also implies that there are unknown effects, weather or other natural incidents, that can affect preparations without one’s knowledge or ability to control it. The land metaphor also implies that leaders can pick and choose what is present in their political support. Especially among dictators or rulers, the ability to “weed out” those who disagree makes this land metaphor very applicable to the functioning of political power.

The metaphorical concept of something being land or the ground is generally a common metaphor because it implies strength or a foundation. However, using it to describe political support and power will also hide certain aspects of those in the conceptual metaphor. By conceptualizing political support and power as land, there is an inherent assumption that political platforms have a foundation, even if it can be “eroded.” Erosion implies a more gradual loss of foundation, instead of the dramatic and quick regime change that can occur. The nature of land also implies that it can be tended to, or “cultivated.” While these things might seem like good aspects of the metaphor to apply to political support, it does not include the chaos and quick changes that can occur in politics. Political support is never a solid foundation; it relies on the whims of the constituency. While support or power can be tended to there is no way to ensure

⁹² 1993 NIE, 11.

⁹³ 1993 NIE, 15.

⁹⁴ 1993 NIE, 20.

⁹⁵ 1993 NIE, 35.

⁹⁶ 1993 NIE, 29, 35.

that the plans will produce anything at all – even if they are carefully put together and given all the necessities for success. This metaphor, while common and easily understood, still hides aspects of support and power that should be considered.

Discussion

The beginning of this paper hypothesized that these documents would contain conceptual metaphors that revealed what was present and hidden in the intelligence officers' views of the world. This study proves the hypothesis correct by showing evidence of metaphors that reveal the analysts' beliefs on states, politics, and war. It also hypothesized that these metaphors would hide significant aspects of geopolitics that analysts should consider. As shown above, there were many conceptual metaphors used to elaborate state behavior and conflict in the NIEs examined. While these conceptual metaphors are not inherently wrong in their depictions of states or political actions, they need to be understood and considered when an analyst is preparing an intelligence product to ensure they have an accurate view of the situation. This point becomes even more important when considering who is reading intelligence products. Policymakers will not only be influenced by the metaphors used in intelligence products but will also have their own metaphorical concepts. Therefore, the metaphors chosen by intelligence analysts can affect not only their own views on a situation, but also the views of policymakers. The ability to accurately describe states' makeup or behavior and political conflict or violence, particularly in war time, is essential to producing relevant and timely intelligence.

The fact that intelligence officers use metaphor is not surprising, but the conceptual metaphors shown in this study prove that metaphors are not simply word play or figures of

speech. As Lakoff and Johnson explained forty years ago, metaphors are powerful.⁹⁷ Metaphors point to concepts that are ingrained into cultures, which cause them to be repeated and passed down to solidify them even more into that culture. Whether the metaphors used are perfectly accurate is not that important, because “the perceptions and inferences that follow from it and the actions that are sanctioned by it,” are what need to be considered.⁹⁸ The metaphors used by the intelligence community are not as important as the results that they produce. If the Intelligence Community does not take the time to consider what metaphorical concepts they have established in their community, they will not realize when those concepts have become outdated or do not apply. The result could be simply a slight mischaracterization in an intelligence product or, as Kerbel mentions, the result could be intelligence surprise and lack of warning.⁹⁹ The use of conceptual metaphors in intelligence goes beyond word choice and needs to be examined to ensure the concepts are relevant and applicable to the current geopolitical situation.

Conclusion

This paper aimed to depict some of the conceptual metaphors present in intelligence writing and how they may reveal the authors’ worldviews. Through examination of National Intelligence Estimates, it is apparent that there were some consistent metaphorical concepts used by the Intelligence Community in the early 1990s. While these conceptual metaphors may be accurate in many ways, the characteristics that are hidden by the metaphors are worth examining to see how they might influence the conclusions of the analysts. As shown in this study, conceptual metaphors used by the IC hide and reveal important aspects of states, conflict, and geopolitics. Because of this, the IC needs to examine the concepts that underlie their intelligence

⁹⁷ Lakoff and Johnson, 157.

⁹⁸ Ibid, 158.

⁹⁹ Kerbel, 2.

products and ensure that they are reevaluated for the current geopolitical situation. This study was not attempting to find and categorize all the conceptual metaphors in these NIEs, but to give some examples of the concepts that are present. This study was a small and outdated look at the metaphors used in intelligence. How many more conceptual metaphors are present and thriving in classified writings that are produced today? Metaphors have a unique ability to reveal how people understand the world and this invaluable resource should not be wasted.

The search for metaphors and their underlying topics could be done comprehensively to find all the underlying concepts present in these intelligence writings. However, that was beyond the scope of this study as the goal was to find some and give a basis for the importance of conceptual metaphors in intelligence writing. The methods used in this study could also be generalized and used to evaluate any set of intelligence documents. To further understand how metaphors are affecting the intelligence process, these methods should be used on more recent documents and on larger samples. By finding the metaphorical concepts used for other topics and more recent time periods, the most prevalent concepts would come to the surface, allowing the IC to evaluate and address whether those concepts are accurate and should continue to be used.

Lakoff states that “metaphors can kill.”¹⁰⁰ While that statement is controversial and may seem hyperbolic, his point is that the use of conceptual metaphors points to beliefs and views that result in actions – and sometimes those actions are deadly. It is apparent that the metaphors found in the examined NIEs can possibly mislead and misconstrue situations that involve conflict and violence. While they might not deserve the phrase, “metaphors can kill,” they at least deserve recognition and reevaluation by the Intelligence Community.

¹⁰⁰ Lakoff, 32.

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